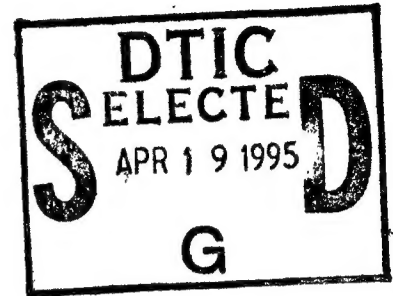


NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

THE ART OF NAMING OPERATIONS

by

Gregory C. Sieminski
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A Paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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16 June 1995

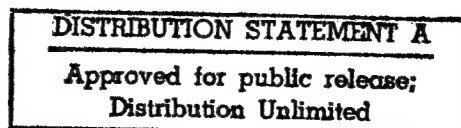
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Abstract of

THE ART OF NAMING OPERATIONS

Effectively naming operations is a powerful means of winning the war of images, a war which is just as critical as the war on the battlefield. In the image war, the operation name is the first bullet fired, and quite possibly the most critical. If artfully molded and aimed, it can be a key ingredient for victory. The U.S. military leadership has begun to learn this truth; since 1989, major operations have been nicknamed with an eye toward shaping domestic and international perceptions about the activities they describe. Like the senior military leadership, mid-level staff officers must acknowledge the significance of operation names and must develop their skill in crafting them, for, like any other aspect of operational planning, this function will initially fall to them. Since creating operation nicknames is an art rather than a science, the best way to learn the art of naming is to study the origins and development of the practice to glean lessons, positive and negative, from past practitioners.

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THE ART OF NAMING OPERATIONS

The effective use of words and media today . . . is just as important as the effective use of bullets and bombs. In the end, it is no longer enough just to be strong. Now it is necessary to communicate. To win a war today government not only has to win on the battlefield, it must also win the minds of its public.

-- Professor Ray Eldon Hiebert
"Public Relations as a Weapon
of Modern War"¹

Shortly after word spread among key military leaders that President Bush had ordered the invasion of Panama, LTG Kelly, Operations Officer on the Joint Staff, received a call from GEN Lindsay, Commander-in-Chief (CINC), Special Operations Command. His call did not concern some last minute change in the invasion plan; rather, it concerned an apparently insignificant detail of the operation: its name. "Do you want your grandchildren to say you were in Blue Spoon*?" he asked. LTG Kelly agreed that the name should be changed. After hanging up the phone, LTG Kelly discussed alternatives with his deputy for current operations, BG Lopez.

"How about Just Action?" Kelly offered.

"How about Just Cause?" Lopez shot back.²

So was born the recent trend in nicknaming operations. Since 1989, major U.S. military operations have been nicknamed with an eye toward shaping domestic and international perceptions about the activities they describe.³ Operation Just Cause is only the most obvious example of this

*I have discarded the American typographic convention of capitalizing operation names in the their entirety on the assumption that this would be distracting in a paper full of such names.

phenomenon. From names that stress an operation's humanitarian focus, like Operation Provide Comfort in Turkey, to ones that stress an operation's restoration of democratic authority, like Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti, it is evident that the military has begun to recognize the power of names in waging public relations campaigns, and the significance of winning that campaign to the overall effort. As MG Charles McClain, Chief of Public Affairs for the Army, has recently written, "the perception of an operation can be as important to success as the execution of that operation."⁴

Like any aspect of operational planning, the job of naming operations initially falls to mid-level staff officers in Department of Defense (DoD) components, agencies, and Unified and Specified (U&S) commands, to which the JCS has delegated considerable freedom in the naming of operations. Because nicknames help determine the way operations are perceived, current and future joint staff officers must develop not only their skill as operational artists but also their art as operational namers.

An appreciation for the art of doing anything is best gained from practitioners, both good and bad. By way of offering a sort of historical apprenticeship, this paper will review the origins and development of the practice of naming operations, with particular emphasis upon the American tradition which emerged from the World War II era. This heretofore unchronicled story contains useful lessons for

staff officers who find themselves tasked to recommend an operation name to a CINC.

Naming operations seems to have originated with the German General Staff during the last two years of World War I. The Germans used code names primarily to preserve operational security, though the names were also a convenient way of referring to subordinate and successive operations. Thus, it is probably no accident that operational names came into use at the same time as the rise of operational art. It was simply easier to get a handle on the complexities of operational sequencing and synchronization by naming each operation something which the staff could remember. The Germans chose names which were not only memorable but also inspiring. Plans for the great western front offensive in the spring of 1918, which saw the most extensive use of operational code names, borrowed names from religious, medieval, and mythological sources: Archangel, St. Michael, St. George, Roland, Mars, Achilles, Castor, Pollux, and Valkyrie.⁵ The selection of these names was undoubtedly an adjunct to Ludendorff's patriotic education program, designed to stir a demoralized and weary army into making one final push.⁶ However, the original, stirring vision conjured by these names was lost when several of the planned operations had to be scaled back. St. George, for example, devolved to the uninspiring diminutive Georgette.⁷

The American military adopted code names during the World War II era, primarily for security reasons.⁸ Its use of code

names for operations grew out of the practice of color coding war plans during the interwar period.⁹ Even before America entered the war, the War Department had executed Operation Indigo,¹⁰ the reinforcement of Iceland, and had dubbed plans to occupy the Azores and Dakar Operations Gray¹¹ and Black¹² respectively. With the outbreak of the war, the practice of using colors as code names was quickly overcome by the need to code name not only operations, but also locations and projects. The War Department adopted a code word list similar in principle to one already in use by the British. In early 1942, members of the War Plans Division (WPD) culled words from an unabridged dictionary to come up with a list of 10,000 common nouns and adjectives which were not suggestive of operational activities or locations. They avoided proper nouns, geographical terms, and names of ships.¹³ Since so many operations would involve the British, they deconflicted the list with the one developed and managed by their counterparts on the (British) Inter-Services Security Board.¹⁴ In March 1942, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the classified Inter-Services Code-Word Index¹⁵ and gave the WPD the duty of assigning code words.¹⁶ Accordingly, the WPD (shortly afterward renamed the Operations Division)[†] assigned blocks of code words to each theater; the European Theater got such

[†]When the War Plans Division was renamed the Operations Division on 23 March 1942, the newly reconstituted Current Section was assigned code management responsibilities, a function it performed for the duration of the war; see Ray S. Cline, United States Army in World War II: Vol. IV. The War Department: Part 2. Washington Command Post: The Operations Division (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951), pp. 106, 131.

names as Market and Garden, while the Pacific Theater got names like Olympic and Flintlock.¹⁷

Although the words listed in the British and American code indexes were randomly chosen, the names of major operations were thoughtfully selected from the lists, at least those Winston Churchill had anything to do with. Churchill was fascinated with code names and personally selected them for all major operations.¹⁸ He had very clear ideas about what constituted appropriate names. After coming across several which he considered inappropriate, he went so far as to instruct an aide to submit all future code names to him for approval; he dropped his demand when he learned of the magnitude of the task,¹⁹ but he did take the precaution of writing down some principles to guide his subordinates:

[1.] Operations in which large numbers of men may lose their lives ought not to be described by code words which imply a boastful or overconfident sentiment, . . . or, conversely, which are calculated to invest the plan with an air of despondency. . . . They ought not to be names of a frivolous character. . . . They should not be ordinary words often used in other connections. . . . Names of living people--Ministers and Commanders--should be avoided. . . .

2. After all, the world is wide, and intelligent thought will readily supply an unlimited number of well-sounding names which do not suggest the character of the operation or disparage it in any way and do not enable some widow or mother to say that her son was killed in an operation called "Bunnyhug" or "Ballyhoo."²⁰

Borrowing a page from the Germans of World War I, whose code naming practices he knew well from writing his four-volume history of that war,²¹ Churchill saw the names of culturally

significant figures as useful sources of operational code words:

3. Proper names are good in this field. The heroes of antiquity, figures from Greek and Roman mythology, the constellations and stars, famous racehorses, names of British and American war heroes, could be used, provided they fall within the rules above.²²

Churchill's commonsense principles for naming operations influenced American as well as British practice. For example, he objected to the code name for the American bomber raid on the Romanian oil fields in Ploesti because he thought that "SOAPSUDS was inappropriate for an operation in which so many brave Americans would risk or lose their lives."²³ He aired his objections through the British Chiefs of Staff, who persuaded the Joint Chiefs of Staff to change the name to the more appropriate and inspirational Tidal Wave.²⁴ Churchill's hand is also evident in the naming of many combined U.S.-British operations, including the American-led invasion of Normandy. The plan for the 1944 invasion was originally Roundhammer, a combination of the code names for invasions planned for previous years, Sledgehammer (1942) and Roundup (1943).²⁵ While Churchill's personal response to the name Roundhammer is not recorded, the British official history of the war calls the name a "revolting neologism."²⁶ Whether this strong reaction was shared by Churchill or not, he changed the name to Overlord,²⁷ deservedly the best known operational code name to emerge from World War II.* The name suggests, as

*Churchill may have sought an alternative to Roundhammer as much for security reasons as aesthetics. This name, in conjunction with the name of

David Kahn has noted, "a sense of majesty and patriarchal vengeance and irresistible power."²⁸ Whether or not Churchill violated his own advice about avoiding names which imply overconfidence, certainly the name Overlord strengthened the resolve of those poised to storm fortress Europe.

The Axis powers also recognized the inspirational value of code names. Although the Japanese typically numbered or alphabetically designated their operations,²⁹ they resorted to inspirational names as their strategic situation worsened, not unlike the Germans during World War I. The Japanese offensive designed to thwart the Allied landings at Leyte Gulf, for example, was optimistically dubbed Operation Victory.³⁰ The Germans made extensive use of code names for plans and operations and usually chose names at random; however, major operations often got special consideration by the German leadership.³¹ Perhaps the most well-known example of this is the code name for the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union. Initially, the operation was christened Fritz, after the son of the plan's author, Colonel Bernhard Von Lossberg.³² But Hitler would not have his grand project named something so pedestrian, Lossberg's sentimental attachment notwithstanding. On 11 December 1940 he renamed the operation Barbarossa, the folk name of the twelfth-century Holy Roman Emperor Frederick

the planned invasion of southern France, dubbed Anvil, gave a pretty clear hint as to the Allies' hammer-and-anvil strategy. While the foregoing is my own speculation, it is known that Anvil was renamed Dragoon precisely because the Allies feared that "the enemy might finally light on the significance of the word." See Forrest C. Pogue, George C. Marshall, Vol. II, Organizer of Victory (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 413.

I who had extended German authority over the Slavs in the east and who, legend said, would rise again to establish a new German Empire.³³ In selecting a name with these inspirational associations, Hitler risked revealing his intentions--the very thing code names are designed to conceal. In the case of Barbarossa, Hitler seems to have been lucky; in the case of Operation Sealion, his planned invasion of Britain, he was not. British intelligence divined Sealion's target from its telltale name.³⁴

The efforts of Hitler and Churchill notwithstanding, World War II operation names had very limited effect on shaping attitudes because they were classified until after the war ended.³⁵ Thus, their effect on troop morale was limited to those with clearances and their effect on public perception was delayed until after the war, at which point the names were merely historical curiosities.

But in America, shortly after the war ended, the War Department decided to use operation names for public information purposes in connection with atomic bomb testing. To this end, the War Department created a new category of unclassified operation names which are known as nicknames to distinguish them from classified code words. Code words are assigned a classified meaning and are used to safeguard classified plans and operations, while nicknames are assigned unclassified meanings and are used for administrative, morale and public information purposes.³⁶

Nicknames offered new possibilities for shaping attitudes about operations. And the first person to make use of one took full advantage of the potential. VADM W. H. P. Blandy, the commander of the joint task force conducting the 1946 atomic bomb tests on Bikini Atoll, selected the nickname Operation Crossroads with great care. He chose it, he told a Senate committee, because of the test's possible significance--"that seapower, airpower, and perhaps humanity itself . . . were at the crossroads."³⁷ VADM Blandy was especially proud of the name and, when he discovered that the word was already assigned to another activity, pulled strings to get it assigned to the Bikini tests.³⁸ The press publicized not only the name, but also Blandy's rationale for selecting it, and did so with general approbation.³⁹ Commenting on Blandy's public relations savvy, one historian wrote: "The choice of names was brilliant, implying to some that the military was unsure of its direction and was truly in awe of the atomic bomb."⁴⁰ However, some in the press were not so enamored with Blandy or his choice of name. In an article lampooning Blandy, The New Yorker, whose literary focus made it keenly aware of the power of words, commented with unmistakable sarcasm that the name "has been greatly admired in literary and non-violent circles."⁴¹ The writer's sarcasm seems intended to suggest that while the general public might admire the name, literary and non-violent audiences were not taken in by Blandy's public relations methods. This would not be the

last time members of the media would resent the military's success in popularizing a carefully chosen nickname.

Although the military had learned the value of well chosen nicknames during peacetime atomic bomb tests, it continued to use meaningless code names during wartime to protect operational security. At least this was true early in the Korean War. In planning the Inchon landing, GEN MacArthur and his subordinates followed the World War II practice of selecting operation names from an established code word list. The earliest plan was dubbed Operation Bluehearts, and the one actually executed was Operation Chromite.⁴²

MacArthur did depart from World War II practice in one important respect; he permitted code names to be declassified and disseminated to the press once operations had begun, rather than waiting until the end of the war.⁵ Thus, combat operation names were, for the first time, public knowledge as operations unfolded. Curiously, MacArthur, with all his public relations savvy, failed to see the opportunities this offered for shaping perceptions.

China's intervention in the Korean War helped LTG Matthew Ridgway see what MacArthur had not. Ridgway took command of the Eighth Army as it was reeling southward under relentless Chinese attack. His first task, he realized, was to restore the fighting spirit of his badly demoralized command.⁴³ One

⁵For example, the name Operation Chromite appeared in Time only ten days after the landing took place. Because the name was meaningless, it received only passing attention. See "Battle of Korea," Time, 25 September 1950, p26.

way he did this was by mounting a series of counteroffensives to which he gave decidedly aggressive nicknames: Thunderbolt (February 1951), Roundup (February 1951), Killer (February 1951), Ripper (March 1951), Courageous (March 1951), Audacious (March 1951), and Dauntless (April 1951). Because these names were not classified once operations began, they were widely disseminated among Eighth Army soldiers to boost morale.⁴⁴ Ridgway's unprecedented use of meaningful combat operation names helped achieve one of the most remarkable transformations of any military organization in history. The reinvigorated Eighth Army pushed the Chinese back to the 38th parallel.

If Ridgway's names helped achieve success on the battlefield, they were not nearly so successful on the home front. Ridgway had publicly announced not only the start of his first major counteroffensive, but also its nickname: Operation Killer.** In doing so, he may have imagined that he could boost the morale of the public in the same way he hoped to inspire his troops. After all, the news from the front had been bad for months--so bad, in fact, that the U.S. Far East Command had suspended communiqués dealing with operational matters the previous fall.⁴⁵ It was probably no coincidence that the communiqués resumed the day after offensive operations recommenced with Operation Killer.⁴⁶ Certainly some

**Ridgway actually told reporters about Operation Killer before it commenced but requested that they not report the information until the attack had begun. See James F. Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War: Vol. III, Policy and Direction: The First Year (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1972), p. 340.

of Ridgway's troops thought that Killer and other names had been chosen with the media in mind.⁴⁷

In any event, more than a few observers objected to Ridgway's operation name, which was prominently displayed in numerous newspaper and magazine articles.⁴⁸ One critic was the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, who informed Ridgway that "the word 'killer' . . . struck an unpleasant note as far as public relations was concerned."⁴⁹ Certainly public relations suffered: several writers criticized the name directly or implicitly in letters to the New York Times;⁵⁰ the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union issued a report in which the name served as the rubric for the entire conflict, which it called a "phony" war emergency⁵¹; Republicans pointed to the term as evidence that the Truman administration had no other aim in Korea but to kill Chinese;⁵² and the State Department objected that the name had soured negotiations with the People's Republic of China.⁵³

While the incident taught Ridgway "how varied . . . the political pressures [can be in waging] . . . a major war,"⁵⁴ he remained unrepentant about his selection of the name: "I am not convinced that the country should not be told that war means killing. I am by nature opposed to any effort to 'sell' war to people as an only mildly unpleasant business that requires very little in the way of blood."⁵⁵ However opposed his nature may have been to soft pedaling the realities of war, operations after Killer and its immediate successor, Ripper, were given less bloody names.

Early in the Vietnam War, operations were often given nicknames descriptive of the missions they designated. For example, a combined U.S. Marine and South Vietnamese operation designed to increase the area of control of the Marine enclave at Da Nang was dubbed Blastout.⁵⁶ The names of air operations in early 1966 suggest the widening of the air war against North Vietnam. The two retaliatory air strikes against carefully selected North Vietnamese installations were known as Flaming Dart I and II, while the gradually escalating strategic bombing effort begun shortly thereafter was known as Rolling Thunder.⁵⁷

The penchant for giving descriptive names to operations in Vietnam caused the military to relearn the lesson of Operation Killer. On 25 January 1966, the 1st Cavalry Division began a sweep operation through the Bong Son Plain which it had dubbed Masher,⁵⁸ presumably because the operation envisioned the enemy being mashed against a second force comprised of Marines.⁵⁹ Owing to the media's free access to military units and the lack of censorship during the war, nicknames like Masher were frequently reported by the media as operations progressed. And because Masher was a major operation conducted by the novel "airmobile cavalry" division, it attracted a fair degree of media attention, causing the name to be widely circulated via television and the press.⁶⁰ When President Johnson heard it, he angrily protested that it did not reflect "pacification emphasis."⁶¹ General Westmorland put it more bluntly when he speculated that "President Johnson

. . . objected . . . because the connotation of violence provided a focus for carping war critics."⁶² To remove their focus, the division commander quickly renamed the operation White Wing.⁶³

The lesson of the Masher incident was not lost on Westmorland: "We later used names of American cities, battles, or historic figures [for operations]."⁶⁴ Indeed, reading the names of operations mounted in Vietnam after February 1966 is like reading a cross between a gazetteer and a history book.⁶⁵ Names such as Junction City, Bastogne, and Nathan Hale were imbued with American associations and values, and thus were politically safe, as well as potentially inspirational.

Like Ridgway, Westmorland tried his own hand at the art of operational naming. And like Ridgway too, he did so to inspire demoralized soldiers. In early 1968, the garrison of 6,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops at Khe Sanh found itself surrounded by an estimated 15,000-20,000 North Vietnamese regulars. Many critics saw a Dien Bien Phu in the making, and the beleaguered troops could not but be infected by the prevailing sense of doom. To combat their dispiriting mood, Westmorland named the 'round-the-clock bombing and shelling of enemy positions Operation Niagara. He selected the name, he said, "to invoke an image of cascading shells and bombs," an image which must have reassured the Khe Sanh garrison.⁶⁶

As the Vietnam war drew to a close, the Department of Defense issued guidelines concerning nicknaming operations for the first time in Information Security Program Directive 5200.1 and an implementing regulation.⁶⁷ It is clear from reading the regulation's guidelines--which remain in force today⁶⁸--that its author(s) learned well the lessons of Operations Killer and Masher. Noting that improperly selected nicknames "can be counterproductive," the regulation specifies that nicknames must not: "express a degree of bellicosity inconsistent with traditional American ideals or current foreign policy"; "convey connotations offensive to good taste or derogatory to a particular group, sect or creed"; "convey connotations offensive to [U.S.] allies or other Free World nations"; or employ "exotic words, trite expressions, or well-known commercial trademarks."⁶⁹ The regulation further stipulates that a nickname must consist of two words (which helps distinguish it from a code word, which consists of only one) and requires the JCS to establish procedures for DoD components to nominate and report nicknames.⁷⁰

In 1975, the JCS implemented these guidelines by establishing a computer system to fully automate the maintenance and reconciliation of nicknames, as well as code words and exercise terms.⁷¹ The computer system, called the Code Word, Nickname, and Exercise Term System (an unwieldy name shortened to NICKA), is still in operation today and can be accessed through the Worldwide Military Command and Control System. The NICKA System is not, as some assume, a random

word generator for nicknames; it is, in fact, merely an automated means for submitting, validating, and storing them. The authority to create nicknames rests not with the NICKA computer but with 24 DoD components, agencies, and U&S commands.⁷² JCS assigns each of these organizations a series of two-letter alphabetic sequences and requires that the first word of each two-word nickname begin with a letter pair from one of the sequences.⁷³ For example, the U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM) is assigned six two-letter alphabetic sequences: AG-AL, ES-EZ, JG-JL, QA-QF, SM-SR, and UM-UR.⁷⁴ Selecting the letter pair UR from the last of these sequences, a USACOM staff officer created the nickname Urgent Fury for the 1983 invasion of Grenada.

Clearly, staff officers in DoD components, agencies, and U&S commands have considerable freedom in creating nicknames, certainly far more than their Vietnam-era predecessors who were limited to American cities, battles and historic figures. There is, and has been for twenty years, plenty of room for artistry in naming operations.

In the first fifteen years of the new system's existence, however, there was very little attempt to exploit the power of nicknaming to improve troop morale or public and international relations. Nicknames used from 1975 through 1988 were generally meaningless word pairs similar to the operation names used during World War II: Eldorado Canyon (the 1986 Libya raid), Praying Mantis (the 1988 air strikes targeting Iranian naval vessels and oil platforms), and Golden Pheasant

(a 1988 show of force to deter Nicaraguan violations of Honduran territory). When nicknames were chosen purposefully, as in the case of Urgent Fury, the effect was overdone. Undoubtedly, the USACOM staff officer who came up with "Urgent Fury" was intent on inspiring the troops executing the mission, but he failed to consider the reaction of the media and general public. The name, which was divulged to the press shortly after the invasion,⁷⁵ only fueled the arguments of critics who accused the military of excess in committing so much combat power to the operation⁷⁶--which, one wag suggested, "the New York Police Department could have won."⁷⁷ Another critic implied that the name belied the rationale for the invasion. Urgent Fury sounded "too militant," he suggested; if we had really been provoked into invading the tiny island nation, then why not "Reluctant Necessity"?⁷⁸

Undoubtedly a key reason for the military's failure to use operation names to improve public relations was the strained relationship which existed between the military and the media during this fifteen-year period. Many in the military blamed the loss of the Vietnam War on the media's critical reporting, which, it was argued, soured the American public's will to continue the fight. Nowhere is this attitude toward the media more evident than in Urgent Fury, where VADM Metcalf initially refused to allow the media access to the combat zone. The motive for this restriction was transparent:

Shutting the press out of Grenada was . . . based on a fear that an unrestrained press might muck things up

again as many senior leaders believed they had done in Vietnam. If the press [was] not present, then there [was] no need to be concerned about . . . media spin.⁷⁹

Given such prevailing attitudes, it is small wonder that the USACOM officer who came up with the name Urgent Fury failed to consider the media's response to the nickname, much less create a name calculated to put a positive spin on the event. The notion that the media could be used to stimulate public support for operations was a foreign idea to most military men of this period.

Just Cause was the first U.S. combat operation since the Korean War whose nickname was designed to shape domestic and international perceptions about the mission it designated. And it is perhaps unsurprising that the man who helped formulate the name, LTG Kelly, held an undergraduate degree in journalism;⁸⁰ such a background undoubtedly enabled him to appreciate what others could not: that naming a thing is tantamount to seizing the high ground in waging a public relations campaign. By declaring the Panama invasion a just cause, the nickname sought to place the impetus for the operation in relation to the injustices of the Noriega regime, with its election fraud, drug trafficking, harassment of U.S. service members and their dependents, and murder of a Marine officer. The gambit largely succeeded. The name, prominently mentioned in Pentagon press releases, was widely circulated by the media, which generally accepted the term without protest.

Network news anchors adopted the phrase 'Operation Just Cause' to refer to the invasion as if they had invented

the phrase. In less than an hour after the Bush administration started using the phrase 'Operation Just Cause,' the network news anchors were asking questions like 'How is Operation Just Cause going?'"⁸¹

At least two editorials adopted the phrase by way of endorsing the invasion.⁸²

Naming the operation Just Cause was risky, however, not only because it was an obvious public relations ploy, but also because it apparently sought to preempt judgment about whether, in fact, the invasion really was moral, legal, and righteous. Some saw this as overreaching. A New York Times editorial entitled "Operation High Hokum" noted how different the nickname was from previous nonsense names and criticized it as an "overreach of sentiment."⁸³ Several years later, a more spirited critic wrote:

It was an extremely cynical gambit to name a blatantly unjust invasion Operation Just Cause. It betrayed the administration's insecurity about an illegal invasion of a sovereign country. The label was, therefore, very important . . . in creating the impression among the general population that the U.S. government was pursuing a morally righteous cause. [It was] blatant propaganda . . .⁸⁴

"Just Cause" illustrates both the power and the limits of nicknames in shaping perceptions about military operations. Few would object to the military engaging in what some have called "public diplomacy"⁸⁵--the attempt to portray its activities in a positive light to bolster troop morale and garner public and international support. Commercial firms carefully consider product names to ensure success in the marketplace; why should the military's approach to naming its

operations be any different? But there is an point at which aggressive marketing turns public relations into propaganda. Going beyond this point breeds cynicism rather than support. Precisely where this point is may be ill-defined, but surely the nickname Just Cause came close to exceeding it.

Operation Just Cause ushered in a new era in the nicknaming of U.S. military operations, one in which operations are given names carefully selected to shape perceptions about them. To fully understand what spawned this new era, one must look beyond the immediate influence of Operation Just Cause. While the Panama invasion certainly helped military leaders recognize how powerful nicknames could be in shaping attitudes, two other important trends were at work.

The first trend was the growing recognition among the military leadership that the media could be an ally rather than an opponent in the public relations effort. Articles arguing for cooperation with the media abound in professional military journals after 1989.⁸⁶ If nicknames were to contain a message, then the media would be a useful means of communicating it.

The second trend was the growing relative importance of nicknames in relation to the shrinking scale of military action. During previous wars like Korea and Vietnam, individual operations were but a small piece of a much larger effort, so operation nicknames attracted relatively little attention. In recent times, when wars are fought with

lightning speed and when circumscribed peacekeeping, humanitarian and relief missions proliferate, a single operation usually encompasses the entire event. The Persian Gulf War is an exception, but even in that case the confrontation consisted of only two operations. Thus, nicknames often serve as synonyms for entire conflicts; "Desert Storm," for example, is frequently used in place of "Gulf War."^{††}

In August 1990, the Central Command (CENTCOM) staff expended considerable effort selecting the best name for the operation designed to defend Saudi Arabia from Iraqi invasion. The very fact that so much effort went into naming Desert Shield suggests the radical change in attitude which had occurred in the nine months since the invasion of Panama, when the transformation of the name Blue Spoon into Just Cause occurred as an afterthought shortly before the operation began. The naming of Operation Desert Shield and its successor, Desert Storm, also illustrates the critical role of artistry in the process.

During the hectic days of planning the deployment to the Gulf, CENTCOM staff officers managed to compile a list of candidate nicknames three pages long,⁸⁷ from which GEN Schwarzkopf initially selected the name Peninsula Shield. The

^{††}A LEXIS/NEXIS word search of major newspapers and magazines for the three-year period January 1990 to December 1994 revealed that the name "Desert Storm" appeared in 8,276 newspaper and 4,466 magazine articles, while the name "Gulf War"--or a variant, like "Persian Gulf War"--appeared in 86,652 newspaper and 13,642 magazine articles. Clearly "Gulf War" and its variants are more popular than Desert Storm, but the frequency with which "Desert Storm" appears (over 10% of the time) is significant.

first two letters of the first word, PE, are not assigned to CENTCOM, so it is clear that CENTCOM felt that selecting the right name was more important than sticking to its assigned alphabetic sequences. However, the JCS rejected the name,⁸⁸ perhaps because the mission called for defending only portions rather than the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula, or simply because "peninsula" was not thought to be characteristic enough of the region. Other names were considered, including Crescent Shield--a name intended to appeal to the Saudis and other Arab allies--but this too was rejected.⁸⁹ In the end, CENTCOM proposed and JCS accepted Desert Shield,** a name which suggested both the region's characteristic geography and CENTCOM's defensive mission.⁹⁰ The metaphor of the shield was well chosen because it emphasized not only U.S. deterrence but also Iraqi aggression, for a shield is only necessary when a sword has been unsheathed; in the context of the metaphor, the deployment of U.S. troops was necessary to deter an Iraqi sword which had already bloodied itself in Kuwait. Such careful and effective wordsmithing played well in the domestic and international arenas and undoubtedly helped mobilize support for the operation.

The naming of the offensive phase of the Gulf campaign was no less effective. Recognizing the success of the nickname Desert Shield, GEN Schwarzkopf played off the name in coming up with Desert Storm,⁹¹ establishing a thematic linkage

**Like the first two letters of "peninsula," the first two letters of "desert" do not fall into the alphabetic sequences assigned to CENTCOM.

which would later be employed in subsequent and subordinate operations as well: the name of the ground offensive was Desert Saber; the redeployment was called Desert Farewell; the distribution of leftover food to the U.S. poor was Desert Share. This family of operation names drew grudging admiration from The Nation: "You have to admire the Defense Department P.R. people who thought up the names for the various phases of the war, each carefully calibrated to send the correct propaganda message."⁹² Characterizing the names as propaganda is a cynical label which could be applied to any government-sponsored public relations effort, but, for all its cynicism, the comment does suggest how successful CENTCOM's operation names were in building positive public relations.

GEN Schwarzkopf was probably inspired to use the storm metaphor by the name of the air operation, which Air Force planners had dubbed Instant Thunder.^{ss} The storm metaphor associated the offensive with the unleashing of overwhelming natural forces, an association which was as politically astute as it was inspirational, for it succeeded in dressing up the coalition's man-made offensive in the more appealing garb of natural phenomena. When the long awaited offensive began, GEN Schwarzkopf played upon the metaphor's inspirational power in his message to his troops; "you must be the thunder and

^{ss}Instant Thunder was a deliberate allusion to Rolling Thunder, the name of the two-and-one-half year bombing operation over North Vietnam, which many Air Force officers believed failed because of its gradual strategy. See Rick Atkinson, Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), p. 59. Instant Thunder seems to be the first instance where a nickname purposefully (and critically) alluded to a previously named operation.

lightning of Desert Storm," he told them.⁹³ The general's statement was widely publicized and admired; one writer commented that Schwarzkopf's rhetoric "sounded positively Churchillian."⁹⁴ Thus, the name served to inspire the nation as well as the troops.

Not all post-Just Cause nicknames have been as successful as Desert Shield and Desert Storm. For example, the name for the U.S. Marine operation to aid victims of the 1991 typhoon which devastated Bangladesh was originally Operation Productive Effort, a name which GEN Colin Powell admitted he never liked and which neither he nor his staff could remember. "[A]fter a day of struggling with Productive Effort, I said to my staff, 'We've just got to get a better name.'" The joint staff found their inspiration in the following day's newspaper, which reported that the Bangladeshis who saw the Marines coming in from the sea by helicopter and landing craft said, "Look! Look! Angels! From the sea!" So the staff renamed the operation Sea Angel.⁹⁵

The Productive Effort incident demonstrates that the military still has some learning to do about the art of naming operations. But offering rules to guide staff officers through the process would be of little value because nicknaming is an art rather than a science. Yet, for those who wish to avoid coming up with their own "Productive Efforts," it may nonetheless be useful to offer four general suggestions which emerge from the last 45 years of nicknaming operations: make it meaningful, target the critical

audiences, be wary of fashions, and make it memorable. These suggestions supplement the prudent guidelines already published in DoD Regulation 5200.1-R.

First, make it meaningful. Don't waste a public relations opportunity, particularly where highly visible operations are involved. If the Gulf War has taught us anything, it has shown us how powerful words and images can be in shaping perceptions. But in the pursuit of a meaningful name, avoid those which border on the propagandistic. It is one thing to put a "spin" on an operation in order to positively shape attitudes; it is quite another to put a label on an operation which insists upon its morality. However righteous an operation might be, a name like Just Cause is distasteful to the media and general public, not necessarily because they disagree with the justness of the cause, but because they resent having such words put (literally) in their mouths. The more prudent course is to find names which reinforce policy objectives by emphasizing the mission and its rationale. Such an approach is likely to satisfy all critics except those who view any government public relations effort as propaganda.

Second, identify and target the critical audiences. While it has been pointed out that "in the global media environment, the information provided to one audience must be considered available to all audiences,"⁹⁶ it is seldom possible to effectively target all potential audiences using a two-word nickname. Thus, one must choose one's target carefully. One's

first impulse may be to consider only the morale of the troops and the support of the American public, but two other audiences should be considered as well: the international community, including allies and coalition partners; and the enemy. The importance of these audiences varies with the situation. Where an operation poses safety concerns to a foreign population, the operation name should be designed to allay those concerns. For example, the operation to remove chemical weapons from Europe was named Steel Box, "a solid, positive name" which "implied leakproof execution, thus reassuring our allies."⁹⁷ Where U.S. forces operate with coalition partners or allies, the operation may benefit from a name that emphasizes solidarity. We routinely use such a strategy in naming combined exercises like Team Spirit, and we sometimes elect to downplay U.S. participation by employing the language of the partner nations, like Fuertes Unitas (United Forces). In certain situations, even the enemy can be the critical audience since operation and exercise names can send clear signals of U.S. intentions. For example, Earnest Will was the name of the operation to escort reflagged oil tankers through the Persian Gulf, a name which helped the Iranians appreciate the firmness of U.S. resolve in defending the vessels. An amphibious exercise mounted before the Gulf War was dubbed Imminent Thunder, a rubric clearly designed to intimidate Saddam Hussein.

Third, be cautious of fashions. Operation nicknames enjoy periods of popularity just like personal names. The

current fashion in nicknaming operations is to make the names sound like mini-mission statements by using a verb-noun sequence: Promote Liberty, Restore Hope, Uphold Democracy, Provide Promise. ("Provide" is the most popular verb, having been used in the names of six different operations during the 1989-1993 period.⁹⁸) There is value in this approach because it tends to keep the mission foremost in the minds of the troops executing it and helps to remind domestic and international audiences about why the mission was undertaken. But there is also a certain formulaic monotony about such names which makes them less memorable than they might otherwise be. Like having a 1950s classroom full of Dicks and Janes, it's hard to tell the Provide Hopes and Comforts apart.

Finally, make it memorable. To shape perceptions, nicknames must gain currency, something which can only happen if they cling to the cobwebs of the mind. This was one failing of the name Productive Effort; the Joint Staff couldn't even remember it, so the general public certainly wouldn't have. The reasons for its singular forgetableness are three-fold: its lack of uniqueness (all operations are efforts, and hopefully all are productive), its abstractness (what is a productive effort anyway?), and its length (five syllables is too long). To avoid these failings, start by identifying unique attributes of the operation. Try to capture those characteristics in concrete language by employing an image or a metaphor. And try to keep each word to two syllables or less. Sea Angel, the name which replaced

Productive Effort, possesses all the traits of a memorable name: uniqueness, concreteness, and brevity. So do Desert Shield and Desert Storm. It is no accident that the latter name is so frequently substituted for the name Gulf War. People remember it.

Applying the above suggestions will result in an effectively nicknamed operation, an outcome which can help win the war of images. In that war, the operation name is the first bullet fired, and quite possibly the most critical. If artfully molded and aimed, it can be a key ingredient for victory.

NOTES

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³ For a comprehensive listing of nicknamed operations over the five-year period starting in 1989, see Francis M. Doyle, Karen J. Lewis, and Lesile A. Williams, Named Military Operations from January 1989 to December 1993 (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC Technical Library, 1994).

⁴ Charles W. McClain, Jr, and Garry D. Levin, "Public Affairs in America's 21st Century," Military Review, November 1994, p. 11.

⁵ Barrie Pitt, 1918: The Last Act (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), pp. 47-50.

⁶ Robert B. Asprey, The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I (New York: William Morrow, 1991), pp. 340-341.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 392-393.

⁸ Memorandum from Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Adjutant General, Subject: Code Words to Designate Plans, Projects, Localities, etc., 10 March 1942 (National Archives Record Group Number 407), p. 1.

⁹ Ray S. Cline, United States Army in World War II: Vol. IV, The War Department: Part 2, Washington Command Post: The Operations Division (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951), p. 65, n. 59.

¹⁰ Mark Skinner Watson, United States Army in World War II: Vol. IV, The War Department: Part 1, Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950), pp. 487-490.

¹¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, United States Army in World War II: Vol. IV, The War Department: Part 3, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1953), p. 50, n. 67.

¹² Ibid., p. 103, n. 22.

¹³ Bill Hines, "Operation CODENAME," Infantry Journal, March 1947, p. 42.

¹⁴ Ibid.; on the code naming functions of the Inter-Services Security Board, see the following sources: Ewen Montagu, Beyond Top Secret Ultra (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1978), p. 52; F. H. Hinsley and C. A. G. Simkins, British Intelligence in the Second World War: Vol. IV, Security and Counter-Intelligence (New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 247.

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¹⁶Eisenhower.

¹⁷Hines, p. 42.

¹⁸Warren F. Kimball, ed., Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence: Vol. I. Alliance Emerging, October 1933-November 1942 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 280; also Vol. II. Alliance Forged, November 1942-February 1944, pp. 491-492.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: Vol. V. Closing the Ring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 662.

²¹Churchill, The World Crisis: 1916-1918 (New York: Scribners, 1927), Vol. I, p. 279; also Vol. II, pp. 125ff.

²²Churchill, Closing the Ring, p. 662.

²³Kimball, Vol I, p. 280.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Michael Howard, History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Military Series: Vol. IV. Grand Strategy, August 1942-September 1943 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Off., 1972), p. 430.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷W. G. F. Jackson, "Overlord": Normandy 1944 (London: Davis-Poynter, 1978), p. 89; Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier's Story (New York: Henry Holt, 1951), p. 172.

²⁸David Kahn, The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 503.

²⁹Hines, p. 43.

³⁰E. B. Potter, Sea Power: A Naval History, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), p. 777.

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³²David Irving, Hitler's War (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p.142.

³³Whaley, p. 18.

³⁴Montagu, p. 53.

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³⁶U.S. Dept. of Defense, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 23 March 1994), pp. 72, 261.

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³⁸Jonathan M. Weisgall, Operation Crossroads: The Atomic Tests at Bikini Atoll (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), p. 32.

³⁹See for example, "Operation Crossroads," New York Times Magazine, 17 February 1946, p. 8.

⁴⁰Weisgall, p. 32.

⁴¹"Notes and Comment," The New Yorker, 27 July 1946, p. 12.

⁴²D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur: Vol. III, Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 465.

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⁴⁵Lindesay Parrott, "U.N. Units Advance More Than 8 Miles in Drive in Center," New York Times, 22 February 1951, p.1:7.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Henry Berry, pp. 26, 209.

⁴⁸Parrott; "Operation Killer," New York Times, 25 February 1951, p. IV 1:3; Lindesay Parrott, "U.S. Forces Launch 2 Attacks on Reds; Main Push Goes On," New York Times, 1 March 1951, p. 1:1; "Gen. Matt and Gen. Mud: Waterlogged Marines Join U.N.'s Operation Killer," Life, 12 March 1951, p. 39; the writer of a letter published in the New York Times noted that he had seen "frequent references in the newspapers, including THE TIMES, to 'Operation Killer'"; see Hugh Gallaher, letter to the editor, printed as "Military Designation Criticized," New York Times, 6 March 1951, p. 26:7.

⁴⁹The words are Ridgway's paraphrasing Collins; see Ridgway, p. 110.

⁵⁰Gallaher; Jacob Herzfeld, letter to the editor, 28 February 1951, printed as "Korea's Holocaust," New York Times, 3 March 1951, p. 12:6.

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- ⁵⁴Ridgway, p. 110.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 111.
- ⁵⁶Gregory R. Clark, Words of the Vietnam War: The Slang, Jargon, etc. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990), p. 365.
- ⁵⁷Ibid, pp. 369, 379.
- ⁵⁸Shelby L. Stauton, Anatomy of a Division: The 1st Cavalry in Vietnam (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1987), p. 70.
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- ⁶⁰Daniel C. Hallin, The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 145; see also the series of stories in the New York Times written by R. W. Apple, Jr. which appeared 28 January (p. 12:2), 31 January (p. 12:1,2) and 2 February (p. 15:6), 3 February (p. 15:5) 1966.
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- ⁶⁴Westmorland, p. 164.
- ⁶⁵For a comprehensive listing of operation names used during the Vietnam War, see Clark, pp. 363-383.
- ⁶⁶Westmorland, p. 164.
- ⁶⁷"DoD Information Security Program," DoD Directive 5200.1, 1 June 1972; reprinted in Federal Register, 3 August 1972, Vol. 37, No. 150, pp. 15655-15686. The guidelines concerning nicknames which appear in Ibid., p. 15685, do not appear in the previous version of DoD Directive 5200.1 entitled "Safeguarding Official Information in the Interests of the Defense of the United States," 8 July 1957; reprinted in U.S. Dept. of Defense, Implementation of Recommendations of Coolidge Committee on Classified Information (Washington: July 1957), Pt. 2, App. 4, Encl. 1, p. 1.
- ⁶⁸The same guidelines appear in the newest version of this regulation: U.S. Dept. of Defense, Information Security Program Regulation, 5200.1-R (Washington: June 1986), p. C-2.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.
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⁸³"Operation High Hokum," New York Times, 23 December 1989, p. 30: 1,2.

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⁸⁵Jonathan Alter et al, "The Propaganda War," Newsweek, 25 February 1991, p. 38.

⁸⁶See for example: McClain and Levin, pp. 6-15; Felman; Brent Baker, "Desert Shield/Storm: The War of Words and Images," Naval War College Review, Autumn 1991, pp. 59-65; William M. Hammond, "The Army and Public Affairs: Enduring Principles," Parameters, June 1989, pp. 57-74.

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⁹³Schwarzkopf, p. 413.

⁹⁴Joshua Hammer et al, "You Must Be the Thunder and the Lightning," Newsweek, 28 January 1991, p. 31.

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